1st May last, brought vaguely to my recollection a leader of yours on Mr. Ruskin's "Seven Lamps of Architecture," in which some allusion was made to crystals of bismuth. I turned up the leader in question, which, I found, dates so far back as 19th May, 1849. There it appears that

"In treating of beauty, Mr. Ruskin, insisting on the fact that 'all most lovely forms and thoughts are directly taken from natural objects,' assumes the converse of this, namely, 'that forms which are *not* taken from natural objects *must* be ugly,' and then attacks the Greek fret, on grounds which cannot be admitted as valid. He says,—'The first so-called ornament, then, which I would attack, is that Greek fret, now, I believe, usually known by the Italian name guilloche (!), which is exactly a case in point. It so happens that in crystals of bismuth, formed by the unagitated cooling of the melted metal, there occurs *a natural resemblance of it almost perfect*. But crystals of bismuth not only are of unusual occurrence in every-day life, but their form is, as far as I know, unique among minerals; and not only unique, but only attainable by an artificial process, the metal itself never being found pure. I do not remember any other substance or arrangement which presents a resemblance to this Greek ornament; and I think that I may trust my remembrance as including most of the arrangements which occur in the outward forms of common and familiar things. On this ground, then, I allege that ornament to be ugly; or, in the literal sense of the word, monstrous; different from anything which it is the nature of man to admire; and I think an uncarved fillet or plinth infinitely preferable to one covered with this vile concatenation of straight lines; unless indeed it be employed as a foil to a true ornament, which it may, perhaps, sometimes, with advantage; or excessively small, as it occurs on coins, the harshness of its arrangement being less perceived.'"

Now I merely desire here to note, in connection with this subject, the rather curious circumstance, that while on the one hand the Greek temples are supposed to have been devoted to magical rites, on the other it appears that in those really magical-looking experiments by Faraday to which reference has been made, as well as in others of a like and even of a more extraordinary nature to be yet anticipated, diamagnetism is the agent, and the principal or most distinguished and peculiar instrument by means of which this quasi-magical agency is brought into play, is bismuth itself! May there not, after all, have been some truth amid the imposture or delusion of the ancient temple rites, and may not that heretofore obscure, but now again distinguished, substance, bismuth, actually have been the anti-type, as it is the only, the *peculiar*, and the perfect example of the Greek temple ornament in question? I do not mean to say that this "plausible hint" is at all likely to constitute the "keystone" to any further light on the origin of such architectural ornaments; but "detached" and "insulated" as its terms may appear, still in these days of new lights on Egyptian hieroglyphics, and of new discoveries of priestly sculptural symbol and architecture in Assyria, I do think that the hint is worth noting, all the more especially since bismuth is regarded as a species of antimony, which is well known to have been a distinguished instrument in the hands of the ancient magicians and alchymists, who called it their "foliated *magnetia*," and who, moreover, spoke of a regulus of iron and antimony (magnetic and diamagnetic!*) which they called the signate star of "*omogene* and *magnetia*," and the "seal of seals:" explanative of this I may add that as bismuth crystallizes in the form of a sort of squared scroll, volute, or spiral, so antimony regulus crystallizes in the shape of a star, which, as Brande remarks, these ancient men of science regarded as a sign and exponent of its pre-eminence amongst minerals. N.B. If I mistake not the star is an ornamental form itself on ancient Greek architecture no less than the scroll or volute and the guilloche and fret.

And, by the way, it is even a singular circumstance that multitudes of beautiful volutes or spirals, so close as at first to appear like innumerable concentric circles, appear on the sides of a glass vessel when chloride or bromide of antimony is precipitated in water and the subhaloidal oxide diffused over the glass and then dried; and that a precipitate of bismuth, when sublimed with iodine, displays much the same phenomenon in the midst of iridescent colours. I may here add, too, cursorily, that the very same singular chemical elements, antimony and bismuth, with others in different combinations, display strange forms, precisely such as the most marked of those on the ancient Egyptian sculptures,—*e.g.* the staff of power, the crux ansata, the royal frontal serpent symbol and other serpentine forms, and, most strange of all, the mummy form of Anubis, with projecting snout, and funereal feathers! There is also a marked vegetative power in these substances that displays itself in beautiful crystalline arborescence and flower shapes, with a multitude of others, such as tridents and even shining or iridescent fish forms, the latter of perfect outline, with fin and tail projections, but all mere laminated crystals, like the pearly fish forms used in card-playing more than anything else.

Patterns of Paper-hangings.—Mr. Owen Jones, in a lecture quoted by you on 3rd ult. remarks, amongst other objections to many absurd patterns of paperhangings, that "nothing is more common than to find strawberries and cherries, or other equally impossible combinations, growing on the same stalk. . . . Strawberries (he adds) do not grow on walls but on the ground; and although roses may be trained over walls, they are not endless representations of the same bunches, nor are they interlaced with satin ribbons." Now amid much that is truthful, it is a pity to be hypercritical, and I think that Mr. Jones is here rather severe on the paper-stainers or their pattern-designers. Perhaps he may have himself thought so since his lecture, if he has seen a little quotation from the *Revue Horticole*, titled "Strawberries grafted on roses," which has been going the round of the newspapers. "Strawberries and cherries" do not seem to be one whit more "impossible" as a combination, than strawberries and roses; and moreover, the rose tribe is a most extensive one, which comprehends, if I mistake not, even the cherry-tree itself, as well as the apple, and other pomaceous trees and shrubs. As for the endless representations of the same bunches, we have nature's authority and example for endless repetition of sameness no less than for endless luxuriance of variety. Look to the rose-tree itself in bloom, or the cherry-tree,—what an endless repetition of one and the same flower,—same not merely in form, but in colour. Indeed, it is only in the vagaries of the fanciful horticulturist that we have anything else. Nevertheless, I do not desire to blunt the edge of Mr. Jones's weapon on this face of it, as I think that some variety thrown in among the sameness of the "bunches" is much called for; but I can tell Mr. Jones, that although it is not very usual to interlace flowers with satin ribbons, it so happens that not a few within my own sight at the present moment were actually tied up and interlaced with silk tape or narrow ribbon, in the spring of the present year, for want of the more usual material at the moment, and it never struck me that there was anything *outré* or devoid of taste in such an accidental trimming to my flowers. By the way, it delights me to observe, that the art-acquirements of my antediluvian friends, the Chinese, as well as those of other Orientals, are noted, as, in many respects, worthy of imitation. These acquirements are inherited and traditional, and they add to the varied and still accumulating evidence of the existence of a grand and shall I say luxurious era of enlightenment or illumination throughout the east in extreme antiquity. N.B. The "wise men" dwelt in "the East."

Scotch Fir and Memel Timber.—One of your correspondents, "N. G." on 17th inst. says, in a short article on Pine Timber, that "the red fir or pine is the 'Pinus Sylvestris' common to the north of Europe, by our people called Scotch fir: in commerce it is called Baltic fir, Riga fir, Memel timber, &c.: it grows also in British America and the north of the United States, and is called red pine in commerce." Can it be possible that Memel timber is in England confounded with and called Scotch fir, or *vice versâ*? In Scotland, as I have reason to know, having there had a good deal of experience in timber, both native and foreign, Scotch fir is regarded in commerce as quite a different sort of article from Memel or Baltic timber. Your correspondent states truly that American pine is freer and less knotty than the red fir of the north of Europe, meaning thereby than either Memel or Baltic timber or Scotch fir. Memel timber, however, occupies a middle place in these respects between Scotch fir and American pine, as it also does in respect to size. Scotch fir is quite a dwarf species compared even with Memel, which is seldom if ever more than half the girth of the enormous American pine. I have seen Memel, however, of greater *length* than American, but Scotch fir in commerce not half so long. Moreover, the girth of Scotch fir is generally so much smaller, that the timber is usually prepared and sold in the round, while Memel, as well as American, are squared before being shipped or imported into this country. To the form of "deals" and "battens," in which form fir wood is also imported, I need not here allude, nor to the distinction and difference in commerce between Memel and Riga, or other northern firs besides the Scotch.

Buckingham Palace and a new National Gallery.—About the time that it was proposed to improve Buckingham Palace, you suggested that since the erection of such noble palaces for the Lords and Commons, the formation of at least as noble an edifice for the Sovereign herself could only be a question of time, and that, as a new National Gallery was then also talked of, it might be well to consider the propriety of converting Buckingham Palace into a National Gallery, and of devoting the money required for the latter instead towards the construction of a new royal palace, as worthy of the country and the Sovereign, as Westminster is of the Lords and Commons. Could not some such arrangement still be carried out?

Brompton Groves.—We all know the value of open spaces to a great and crowded population, but we do not always keep in view the vast importance of adjoining or of intermingling vegetation, as of trees, gardens, parks, in not only absorbing the foul or used-up air (carbonic acid) expelled from the lungs of that crowded population, but in recruiting the atmosphere with the free oxygen or vital air which they ought to breathe. Keeping these most important facts in view, the importance of the vegetation and the open space of such a gore or gushet, running in between inhabited districts towards the centre of population, as the groves and vales of Old Brompton constitute, cannot be exaggerated. Is it not possible to prevent the choking up of this breathing-funnel with brick and mortar. Should not the Government purchase the property, were it but for a foul-air consumer and an oxygen manufactory, wherewith to refresh the millions of the metropolis? Might they not do so, while at the same time erecting their proposed National Gallery in the midst of it, and converting it into pleasure-gardens for the people? It closely adjoins the very sites already pointed out as the most eligible for the Gallery,—namely, the vicinity of Kensington-palace. I have a lingering hope that something or other of this sort may yet be done ere it be too late.—J. E. D.

"BELGIUM AND THE RHINE."—As the Queen's visit to Antwerp will probably help to lead our travel-loving population Belgium-wise, Mr. Murray has issued, under this title, part of his well-proved "Handbook for Travellers on the Continent," now too well known to need commendation.

* It is well known to chemists that nothing more completely neutralises the magnetism of iron than antimony, so that there is something profoundly significant and scientific in the ancient association of two such elements, as constituting a distinguished combination. The very name of "the magnetics" given to such substances as antimony, arsenic, and bismuth (or marcasite, as they called the last of these), when taken in connection with Faraday's discovery of their diamagnetic pre-eminence, is of itself remarkable.

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